



ARC Mental Health Information Series

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Refugee Mental Health

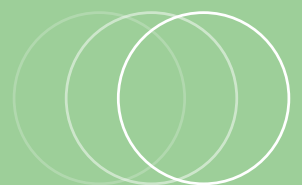
Increased political, environmental and economic instability in the world drives thousands of people each year to seek refuge in Canada. A refugee is someone living outside his or her home country that is unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of a justifiable fear of persecution. In 2022 64,115 asylum claims were accepted in Canada. Refugees made up a small percentage of the total 431,645 new permanent residents that were accepted to Canada in the same year.



Refugees have experienced numerous losses – they are already dealing with the loss of their homeland, their way of life, and the safety and security of their homes. They have also incurred financial losses, which many may never recover from. Their careers are likely severely affected, while children’s education may be put on hold for indefinite amounts of time. Most devastating are the loss of loved ones, families, relatives, friends, colleagues or neighbours.

The pain that comes with loss and grief is compounded by the horror of having experienced, witnessed or confronted a range of upsetting and traumatic events including war, torture, death, danger, threats and violence.

Some studies show that the prevalence of common mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is higher among migrants and refugees than among host populations. Asylum seekers also tend to be at an elevated risk of suicide.



Symptoms

- Distressing, intrusive thoughts, images and flashbacks of the traumas they went through
- Nightmares and disturbed sleep, waking up shaking or screaming
- Feeling hyper-vigilant or on guard for signs of threat or danger with constant fear of something bad happening
- Experiencing physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension, feeling restless, abdominal distress, high blood pressure, changes in appetite or sleep
- Hopeless feelings that nothing will ever change, which could also lead to suicidal ideations
- Feeling helpless and powerless; beliefs of not having control over anything

Additionally immigrant communities may also face a lack of access to medical care in their language, mental health stigma, stereotypes and discrimination.

What can you do to help reduce mental health challenges faced by refugees

- Culturally appropriate and trauma-informed health care can ease the distress many refugees face. Seek out any training that you can in your profession.
- Challenge racist and discriminatory behaviours or beliefs that you may encounter.
- Be patient with a newly arrived person who may take longer to integrate into the community or learn a new language due to the mental health challenges they face.

Resources available

Rivo-Resilience: An organisation that offers mental health services to immigrants with PTSD.
1274 Jean-Talon St. E., Suite #201, Montreal QC H2R 1W3, (514) 282-0661, <https://rivo-resilience.org>

Maison International de la Rive Sud – (450) 445-8777, www.mirs.qc.ca

Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health Project – www.camh.ca/en/professionals/professionals-projects/immigrant-and-refugee-mental-health-project

PRAIDA – service through CIUSSS Centre-Ouest de Montreal to help asylum seekers get access to appropriate care and meet their psychosocial needs.

35 Port-Royal St. E., Montréal (Québec) H3L 3T1, (514) 484-7878 ext. 64500

CLSC St-Hubert (450) 443-7400

CLSC Brossard (450) 445-4452

CLSC St-Jean-sur-Richelieu (450) 358-2572

CLSC Richelieu (450) 658-7561

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